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FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2197
INFO ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
AMEMBASSY KABUL
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000255

DEPT. ALSO FOR S/CPR, AMB. DON ENSENAT
KABUL FOR JEFF HAWKINS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2011

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SUBJECT: TO WED OR NOT TO WED: THAT IS THE ROYAL QUESTION

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR GENE B. CHRISTY. REASONS: 1.5 B & D.

11. (C) SUMMARY: THE CROWN PRINCE, AL-MUHATADEE BILLAH, IS EXPECTED TO WED IN AUGUST. THE ONLY UNANSWERED QUESTION IS WHO WILL BE HIS BRIDE. THE WEDDING IS IMPORTANT. IT WILL ALLOW THE CROWN PRINCE TO START A FAMILY -- AND, WITH LUCK, PRODUCE A MALE HEIR. IT WILL ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR A TRANSFER OF POWER FROM THE CURRENT SULTAN, ALTHOUGH SUCH A CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IS LIKELY AT LEAST A DECADE AWAY. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN FORMED. THE CROWN PRINCE HAS BEEN ELEVATED TO FOUR-STAR GENERAL OF THE ARMY. HE MAKES ALMOST DAILY VISITS TO SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, AND LOCAL MEDIA COVER THESE EVENTS SLAVISHLY. TOP POSITIONS IN THE NATIONAL SOCIAL HIERARCHY HAVE BEEN FILLED. ALL THIS ACTIVITY POINTS IN ONLY ONE DIRECTION. THE CROWN PRINCE, NOW AGED 32, IS FINALLY GOING TO MARRY. EVEN THE DATE IS PRETTY WELL KNOWN: THE WEEK OF AUGUST 10. THE ONLY QUESTION: WHO'S GOING TO BE THE BRIDE?

13. (C) IN 2003, THERE WERE ACTIVE RUMORS THAT THE CROWN PRINCE WOULD WED IN EARLY DECEMBER. THE BRIDE WAS EXPECTED TO BE THE DAUGHTER OF A NON-ROYAL BRUNEI WOMAN AND AN IRISH FATHER. SHE HAD MET THE CROWN PRINCE WHEN THEY WERE STUDYING IN THE UK. NOTHING CAME OF THAT RUMOR REPORTEDLY BECAUSE BOTH THE SULTAN AND THE RAJA ISTERI (QUEEN) OBJECTED TO THE MARRIAGE. SOME RUMORMONGERS SAID IT WAS BECAUSE THE YOUNG WOMAN WAS A MIXED-HERITAGE COMMONER. OTHERS WHISPERED THAT SHE HAD A CHECKERED PAST, INCLUDING INTIMATE RELATIONS WITH SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.

14. (C) MORE RECENTLY, THE RUMORS OF A ROYAL WEDDING IN 2004 HAVE BECOME MORE CONCRETE. EARLY RUMORS CLAIMED THAT THE CROWN PRINCE HAD, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED WAY, STOOD UP TO HIS PARENTS AND DECLARED THAT HE WOULD MARRY THE COMMONER. NOW, HOWEVER, THE STORY MAKING THE ROUNDS OF THE CAPITAL IS THAT THE SULTAN AND RAJA ISTERI HAVE FOUND A MORE SUITABLE CANDIDATE AND THAT THE CROWN PRINCE HAS ACQUIESCED. THE REPORTED CANDIDATE BRIDE IS THE 18-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER OF A PENGIRAN (ROYAL FAMILY RELATIVE) EMPLOYED IN THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT AND A SWEDISH MOTHER. NO PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE, NOR IS IT CLEAR WHEN THE MARRIAGE WILL BE ANNOUNCED. (NOTE: THE CURRENT SULTAN'S WEDDING, AT AGE 19, WAS ANNOUNCED ONE WEEK BEFORE. END NOTE)

15. (C) THE CROWN PRINCE'S IMPENDING WEDDING HAS FUELED RUMORS THAT THE SULTAN WILL DO WHAT HIS OWN FATHER DID AND RETIRE AS SULTAN A YEAR OR TWO AFTER THE WEDDING. A SENIOR MITSUBISHI OFFICIAL FROM JAPAN RAISED THAT SCENARIO UNDIPLOMATICALLY WITH MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS PEHIN ISA LAST WEEK. ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL MITSUBISHI REPRESENTATIVE (PROTECT), PEHIN ISA TOOK THE QUESTION IN STRIDE. PEHIN ISA RESPONDED THAT THE CURRENT SULTAN IS IN VERY GOOD HEALTH AND CONTINUES TO ENJOY HIS ROLE AS SULTAN. HE DISCOURAGED SPECULATION THAT THE MARRIAGE MIGHT PORTEND A CHANGE IN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

16. (C) COMMENT: THE CROWN PRINCE'S HEALTH IS NOT GOOD (DIABETES AND OTHER PROBLEMS), AND THE ROYAL FAMILY HAS FOR SOME TIME ENCOURAGED HIM TO MARRY. THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN THAT HIS SOCIAL LIFE HAS BEEN SO CLOSELY WATCHED AND RESTRICTED

THAT HE HAS NOT HAD MUCH CHANCE TO MEET ANYONE. AND NONE OF THE COUSINS INTRODUCED TO HIM HAVE WON FAVOR. THE SULTAN AND RAJA ISTERI ARE REPORTEDLY ANXIOUS THAT THE CROWN PRINCE PRODUCE A MALE HEIR. THEY ALSO HAVE REPORTEDLY ENCOURAGED HIM TO LOOK FOR A WIFE MORE GENETICALLY REMOVED THAN THEIR OWN GENERATION, AFTER MANY ROYAL CHILDREN, INCLUDING THE CROWN PRINCE, HAVE SHOWN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HANDICAPS THAT ARE ATTRIBUTED TO INTERMARRIAGE OF BRUNEIAN ROYALS. THAT MAKES THE HALF BRUNEIAN-HALF SWEDISH, BUT ROYAL BLOODED, CANDIDATE BRIDE A GOOD MATCH. MOREOVER, A ROYAL MARRIAGE WILL HASTEN THE DAY THE CURRENT SULTAN CAN CONSIDER DOING WHAT HIS OWN FATHER DID: RETIRING AND SERVING AS A MEMBER OF A DE FACTO REGENCY WHILE CROWN PRINCE BILLAH GETS INTO HIS OWN RULING STRIDE. GIVEN THE SULTAN'S GOOD HEALTH AND APPARENT ENJOYMENT OF HIS CURRENT POSITION, HOWEVER, SUCH A DEVELOPMENT APPEARS AT LEAST A DECADE AWAY.

17. (U) KABUL MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

CHRISTY